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The Passing of a Friend

The news early in June of the death of E. L. Coburn, for many years supervisor of music in St. Louis, made many of us feel that a real part of our own lives had passed on to another sphere. For his kindness had endeared him to a large circle of acquaintances and friends, had made him a part of our emotional and intellectual life. We live largely in our friends, and are strong in proportion to the depth and scope of our friendships. Friend Coburn helped to make this world a better, kindlier place for all of us; a visit with him made everyone feel a new zest for action.

From much material that was available I have selected two personal letters, not written for publicity. They speak well for our beloved comrade.

P. W. Dykema.

A Letter from One of Mr. Coburn's Assistants.

The sad death of our Supervisor Mr. E. L. Coburn is known to you, but I think it would please you to know something of the facts, for he had a unique and interesting personality, and his loss is a serious one to his department and many friends. Mr. Coburn was fifty-nine years of age, looked much younger and retained his youthful pleasure in all things. He came from Boone, Iowa, fifteen years ago, as supervisor of music in McKinley High, and a couple of years later was made executive head of the music department. His work was advisory and directive—he understood the personalities of the twenty musicians in his department and was particularly clever and lovable in the way he brought out the talents of each member. During his administration the music supervisors grew from seven to twenty; new courses of study were introduced; and many books supplemented the regular music course. The work progressed through unanimity of his entire force.

The plan of giving yearly concerts embracing the entire city he started twelve years ago. He first selected a hundred from each of the five high schools. At the first concert in 1909 in the Odeon the effect on the audience was startling and the enthusiasm was monumental. Every year since the concerts have been given with professional soloists. Such Operas as Martha, Aida, and Il Trovatore, with all of our high schools in the chorus were presented. Many other interesting works were included, chief of them—"The Creation".

Then too he introduced a high school music festival for the City Men's Club—a large business organization, twenty singers from each high school. This year the concerts occurred from the 22nd of April to the 1st week of May. On Saturday at the City Club, the Soldan Orchestra with Miss Finn at the piano, accompanied the choruses in a miscellaneous programme such as Gounod's Sanctus selections from Rossini's Stabat Mater, the soloists being selected from the supervisors. Then followed a week of concerts, elementary orchestra work—three hundred from all the grammar grades under Mr. E. Hahnel—grammar school concerts from the 6th grade up, all accompanied by elementary school orchestras and lead by Mr. Coburn. The culmination was the high school concert on Friday, May 7 in Hiawatha's Wedding Feast by Coleridge Taylor—with soloists and orchestra from the music department. Mr. Coburn was happier than we had ever known him to be. He led the community singing with marked success—and with his humorous remarks had the audience with him. The entire series of concerts was a great success and he visited around, saying he felt his work was reaching a culmination, a sad truth. On Friday, April 21, he brought out the Indian Princess to the Soldan high where she gave a concert. Afterwards he led the chorus in one song then turned to me—and said "You lead them, Miss Finn—I'm worn out." He remained to luncheon and chatted with all, but complained that he was worn out and not well, and would not report to the office. He remained at home Saturday and Sunday afternoon he was overcome by a

fainting spell. It was found that he was suffering from a hemorrhage, from ulcer of the stomach. He was rushed to the hospital for a blood infusion but died just as he heached there. His death was a shock as no one had considered him seriously ill. He leaves a widow and two children, Mary aged 15 and Wm. aged 13.

A beautiful programme was given by the pupils and supervisors on Tuesday the 24th, and it spoke well for his life work, that the high school children sang exquisitely without a leader. The funeral services were at the church in Jefferson, Iowa, and the singing there was by former pupils, on May 25. We have lost a unique and loving friend. M. Teresa Finn.

A Letter of Appreciation from One Who Knew Him Well.

I knew E. L. Coburn probably as well as anybody outside of his own family. He had certain very sterling qualities, chief of which was his capacity for being a true friend. In exercising this faculty it was inevitable that he should have many friends amongst those with whom he associated. Coburn's friends were legion in St. Louis where he was best known.

Another quality that Coburn had, as you of course know, was that of cheerfulness and optimism. He always saw the bright side of things, and this helped him over most of the rough places because Coburn was not a man who had an over-exaggerated opinion of his own ability. He felt his limitations. But you never could get Coburn under for long because of his optimistic temperament and cheerful habit of thought and speech.

His strength as a Supervisor of Music was largely executive. He knew how to select good people for his department and leave them unhampered to do their work. He used to tell me that he would not have anyone in his department who did not know more than himself. Coburn succeeded in surrounding himself with strong people, as I have said above, and he knew how to inspire and direct these people.

However, Coburn was more than an executive. He was a born teacher. His ability as a teacher showed to better advantage probably with the little people. His faculty with little children was inimitable, and he never failed in winning their interest and heartiest cooperation to the task set before them.

Coburn was more of a musician than most people thought. Twenty-five years ago I used to consider him an excellent pianist and at that time he sang and with a cultivated voice. In the later years he rather lost the habit of keeping up in his musical practice under the stress of the daily routine which absorbed his energies completely. Coburn, however, was a student, and there was not a day that he did not exercise the habit of reading some solid piece of literature, something requiring the exercise of the faculty of thought and memory. He had a lot of information and ideas on out-of-the-way subjects, which only those who knew him well found out about.

Coburn was a natural leader of men and was never at a loss for the right word, quite often humorous, when before a mixed gathering. This ability stood him in good stead as a community song leader in which work he was particularly successful.

He stood for the best ideas and ideals in musical philosophy and pedagogy, His spiritual insight kept him safe in the methods of instruction that he adopted and worked out with the young people. He was for the "spirit that giveth power" as against the "letter that killeth" in his method of instruction. All in all, Coburn was one of the strongest characters in the field of educational music.

As a man, he was true as steel, and genuine through and through. He loved to do for others and was happiest when doing for others. A big, noblehearted man whose spirit lives after him in the hearts of his friends.

Clarence C. Birchard.